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ABSTRACT

Education professors are being attacked for the way they prepare people to teach. This criticism is not well founded; teacher preparation programs are being made scapegoats so that the public can avoid facing the hard facts that constitute the core of the problems within the teaching profession. Nowhere has the attack on teacher education been more sustained and yielded more drastic proposals than in the state of New Jersey. Much of this criticism has been motivated by politicians seeking to benefit from the publicity surrounding educational reform. National commission reports have focused nationwide attention on education, and the new Republican leadership in New Jersey has been eager to upstage the reforms set in motion by the previous Democratic administration. A panel established by the new education commissioner to determine the skills needed by beginning teachers was rigged to reflect the administration's position. An instate commission appointed to figure out how the panel's recommendations should be incorporated was also loaded in the commissioner's favor. The state eventually adopted a teacher education program that provided an alternative to the college programs. Even though this is an easier and cheaper way to train teachers, the commissioner may regret his victory. His program will be scrutinized and any evidence of deficiencies will be broadcast vigorously. (GJ)

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THE POLITICS OF TEACHER EDUCATION REFORM

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INTRODUCTION

American education is in constant agitation. There is always a bandwagon starting up somewhere. People who today are looking askance at the computer idolatry in education may themselves have been gurus of the instructional television craze of twenty years ago. The recent emphases on urban education and minimum basic skills have been superseded by renewed concern for suburban education and the gifted and talented. One can wonder whether the very latest concerns simply reflect the determination of some people to insure that their children's competitive edge is not eroded by egalitarian schemes (Howe & Edelman, 1985). At any rate, each of you can come up with your own examples of the dialectic of education.

One of the groups most responsible for this ferment is the education professoriate. A professorial career can be made by transmitting traditional educational practice, but to establish a scholarly reputation something new must be said. Indeed, the university professoriate presumably get tenure and promotion on the basis of making "original contributions." The something new that gets said in this scramble can also be, and usually is, something old. Recycling old ideas is perhaps the most common form of "original" contribution, which explains the sense of *deja vu* one gets in reading the journals. The only constraint in this reinvention of the past is that a decent interval must elapse between the current incarnation of an idea and its last incarnation, lest one be accused of mere mimickry.

Since the education professoriate, at least in the universities, are forever engaged in the act of finding fault with the *status quo* (and then recommending a return to the *status quo ante*), it is a kind of poetic justice that the professional politicians have, over the past year or so, been

finding fault with the education professoriate and recommending a return to some other statuses quo ante.

We education professors are being attacked for the way we prepare people to teach. There is a peculiar logic which makes the attack seem overdue rather than sudden. First, there was lamentation in the land that kids weren't learning enough of the officially approved knowledge, as measured by the official barometers. Then there was the suspicion that if kids weren't learning what they were being taught maybe it was because they weren't being taught it, after all, or weren't being taught it well enough to learn it. Teachers became the culprits. This led to the further suspicion that if teachers were no longer teaching well it was probably because they had not been taught well how to teach well. Teacher educators became the real villains, and we are having trouble finding someone up the line to whom we can pitch the potato.

The logic of the attack on teacher education is, of course, flawed, which makes all the more dismaying the amount of time it took for this illogic to coalesce in the minds of politicians. But then the politicians may have more practical matters in mind, such as seizing on an issue that can be converted quickly into career-enhancing headlines. That all of the officially approved school knowledge is essential knowledge and that the officially approved ways of measuring its possession are valid are assumptions that politicians are willing to make in order to avoid technical thickets that have no sex appeal and no easy exits. The attempts that were made in the 1970s - most notably in the state of Oregon - to define the kinds of knowledge that are needed in the adult world came to nought because of the diversity and unpredictability of the adult world. Absent

any discernibly better knowledge for kids to learn, a cry went up that kids be compelled to learn more of the same kinds of stuff they had been learning, and that their elders had been required to learn. This traditional knowledge is measured by such old standby instruments as the Scholastic Aptitude Test, and these instruments serve not only to gauge one's command of the knowledge but to give the knowledge a commanding position in school curricula (Nairn, 1980; Jencks & Crouse, 1982).

Alas, scores on these tests started falling and explanations had to be found. When Educational Testing Service tried to determine what was causing the SAT score decline, a whole host of possibilities loomed - from too much TV watching by children to too much divorce among their parents to too many working mothers. But these possibilities all fell under the heading of "unalterable variables." They did not lend themselves to public policy intervention. Two areas that were modifiable were curriculum and instruction. Back-to-basics in the curriculum and time-on-task in the classroom became the nostrums for our educational ills. In other words, teach the kids what they're going to be tested on and teach it to 'em longer. Kids have a perverse way of not learning what they're not taught and of eventually learning that which is drummed into them at great length. The conventional wisdom became the professional wisdom.

This might have been the end of matters, with the public watching with approbation the annual inching up of test scores by students who were being prepared more deliberately for the tests, including the Scholastic Aptitude Test itself since ETS had finally conceded the possibility that coaching could help. However, there were other test data being reported at about this same time, and these data were on the performance of <u>teachers</u>. The

data indicated that teachers did not know well that which they were supposed to be teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1984; Feistritzer, 1984; Weaver, 1984). Now there are all kinds of problems with these data: some of them were not even collected on teachers but on high school students who reported that they intended to major in "education" when and if they ever got into college; other of the data were in subjects unrelated to a teacher's area of instructional responsibility. Nevertheless, the general impression left with the public was that today's teachers do not know much and what they do know is less than was known by the teachers of yesteryear. Once again, an explanation was demanded. And once again factors were cited that everyone agreed were plausible explanations but which constituted "difficult-to-modify variables." It was said that teaching had become a low-salaried, low-prestige, high-aggravation job that no longer attracts very bright people. Raising salaries significantly means raising taxes significantly; raising prestige means raising salaries or at least some costly perquisites; and lowering the aggravation means depopulating the schools. Clearly, a convenient scapegoat was needed in order to avoid facing these hard facts. Perhaps the rhinestones who came into teaching careers could have been polished into diamonds if they had gone through better teacher preparation programs in college. Maybe the teacher preparation programs were so bad that they actually turned the rhinestones into rhinestones-in-the-rough. Mind you, it wasn't the colleges that had this baneful effect, only that 20-30 percent of the college curriculum that was devoted to professional education. If a high school math teacher cannot explain polygons or a social studies teacher is unfamiliar with the Webster-Ashburton Treaty, it is not the liberal arts professors who

failed those teachers, it is the education professors. To distribute the responsibility more evenly - and fairly - just gets us back to another one of those intractable variables, in this case the whole institution of college.

Teacher educators have had to reconcile themselves to the fact that they were in for a long period of vilification by politicians who did not wish to reexamine the purposes of schooling in a democracy and the resource allocations required to realize the purposes. Teacher educators could also expect to be abandoned by their liberal arts colleagues who take the value of their own work on faith born of habit. And teacher educators are frequently the objects of scorn from their own students, who assume the superiority of liberal arts on faith bred of intellectual immaturity. The very demarcation between liberal arts and professional education, as though ne'er the twain shall meet let alone o'erlap, is an entrenched myth which functions to the detriment of teacher education.

Unfortunately, there is enough bad practice in teacher education to provoke popular disdain. Those of whom little is expected often live down to the expectation. Probably everyone in teacher education can compile a compendium of horror stories about colleagues, and perhaps about himself or herself. Lately there has been a fresh inducement to shoddiness. If, given their salaries and working conditions, it is unreasonable to demand a lot from teachers, then, given the career prospects of teacher education students, it may be unreasonable for <u>their</u> teachers to demand a lot from them. Startling evidence of the sloppiness of which schools of education are capable was revealed on the front pages of New Jersey's newspapers a couple of years ago. The Governor's designee as State Education Commissioner was found to have plagiarized at least half

of his dissertation, and in a way that would cause suspicion with even a cursory reading. His dissertation committee had not detected this and he had been able to flaunt a doctoral degree in education for more than ten years as he rose in the ranks of New Jersey and Pennsylvania officialdom.

Speaking of New Jersey brings us to the major focus of this paper. No where has the attack on teacher education been more sustained and yielded more drastic proposals than in the state of New Jersey, and it is the political machinations in New Jersey, a state well known for same, to which we now turn.

MOTIVATIONS

New Jersey was not the most probable place to lead the attack on teacher education. It had just gone through a four-year period of legislative review and augmentation of the requirements for the college teacher certification programs. New standards - known as the Newman standards - had just been codified and the implementation of these standards had just begun. Thus, it was difficult to attack programs that had just been reformed extensively, especially when the reforms were still in the implementation stage. This circumstance makes it seem likely that the attack on teacher education in New Jersey was politically motivated, that is, motivated by a desire by politicians to score public relations points by stepping into a new national spotlight. New Jersey's anomalous position is captured well in a U.S. Department of Education document (1984). The document reports that in 1984 19 states were considering changes in teacher education and certification, and that 28 states had already enacted or

approved such changes. New Jersey was in both categories: it had just approved and was enacting a new set of standards, and it was denying the effectiveness of those standards before they had been enacted.

National commission reports had focused nationwide attention on education, and New Jersey had new Republican leadership which was not about to ask the public to be patient with the reforms set in motion by the previous Democrat administration. Public attention had been drawn to education and the political incumbents had to do something that was dramatic enough for people to know that something was being done. Moreover, the newly elected Governor had served on one of the national commissions - the Task Force on Education for Economic Growth - which could only have increased his resolve to be an "education governor." Never mind that the quality of the analyses done by the national commissions has been challenged seriously in the dialectic that inevitably attends such blockbusters (Dianda, 1984; McNett, 1984; Stedman and Smith, 1983), and forget that more recent data fail to support the apocalyptic conclusions of the commissions (Gallup, 1984: Lapointe, 1984); the front pages did not carry the analyses or the rebuttal data, and it is the front pages from which the political agenda is derived.

The new Governor and his newly appointed Education Commissioner had little trouble rallying the business community to their side. The Governor is a Republican who succeeded an eight-year liberal Democrat, so he had the support of the business community on principle. What is interesting to note is the success the Governor and Commissioner had in garnering support from the higher education leadership in the state. The Chancellor of Higher Education joined in support for the Commissioner and so did the presidents of

some of the state colleges, and also the president of Rutgers - the state university. The Chancellor of Higher Education seems intent on cutting back on education faculty lines. After a falling out they had, the Chancellor was accused publicly by the Education Commissioner of harboring this intention all along:

> . . . over and over again you have described the problem of the number of tenured faculty members in education programs which have low enrollments. These faculty members, you have said, tie up the resources of the colleges without generating tuition revenues and therefore prevent the institutions from hiring new faculty in "growth" areas. . . . you have emphasized primarily the state colleges which you say are funded by an enrollment forumla, which have high numbers of tenured education faculties and which have achieved, in your judgment, only modest success in developing quality programs in new demand areas (Cooperman, 1984, p. 12).

The Chancellor's staff now acknowledge that decreasing the number of faculty lines in education has been a goal of the Chancellor (Braun, 1984). Some of the college presidents would like to see the Chancellor fulfill his intention because this would permit a diversion of faculty lines from education to new high demand disciplines such as accounting and computer science. In New Jersey's zero sum higher education economy, adding faculty lines to a given discipline can only be done by subtracting lines from some other discipline. The state colleges, having been converted from teachers colleges to liberal arts colleges in the late 1960s, still have large and largely tenured education faculties who stand as roadblocks to the development of other disciplines. Moreover, education faculty are not considered to be indispensable ingredients of a liberal arts college so they can have more students and still less security than the philosophy faculty.

What gives fresh urgency to the agenda of the college presidents are the

recent projections of a looming teacher shortage. There is an anticipated demand for an additional half million elementary school teachers by 1995 (Reed, 1984). If there is going to be a demand for teachers and if these teachers are to be trained through college programs, then the college education faculty will start to burgeon again, and the liberal arts colleges which were once teachers colleges will be at risk of returning to their former status. Training lots of new teachers through the college education programs would also mean a major tax outlay for this purpose. What makes this prospect even more problematic is the likelihood that the demand will be one generational. That is, the mini-baby boom (if you can forgive that expression) will probably last for only one generation of students, after which the college education faculty who had been hired to train the teachers needed by this generation, and who had been granted tenure during the process, would become the newest roadblocks to higher education diversification. A way had to be found to meet the imminent demand for more teachers that was both cheap and divorced from the college education programs.

THE COMMISSIONER'S PROPOSAL

In September of 1983, New Jersey's Education Commissioner presented a proposal for the preparation of teachers. The proposal established the following "route" by which someone could qualify for a New Jersey teaching license:

1. Possess a bachelor's degree with at least a minor in the field to be taught, with any liberal arts minor being acceptable for elementary and special education*;

*In time, special education was dropped from the proposal because of protests by advocacy groups that its inclusion defied reason.

2. Pass a test of subject mastery in the secondary field to be taught or a general knowledge test for elementary and special education;
3. Complete a one-year internship as a regular classroom teacher in a local school district. The internship would commence with a five-day orientation to the district and to all the important information about teaching. During the course of the year, three professional days could be devoted to learning more about teaching. (Cooperman, 1983)

This proposal immediately fell victim to legitimate criticisms which, alas, were dismissed by the Commissioner as the self-serving whining of education professors. The proposal called for a five-day orientation, during which the prospective teacher would learn all the essential knowledge needed by a beginning teacher, and after which the hurriedly oriented tyro would be given full responsibility and full salary for taking over a classroom. Since it takes more than five days to train a waiter or waitress at most restaurants, it was clear that New Jersey was prepared to consign teachers to the lower end of the service worker category. Moreover, the Commissioner who said that five days would suffice to give beginning teachers all they needed to know then announced that he was appointing a panel to tell him what beginning teachers needed to know.

The panel was a political masterstroke by the Commissioner since it was chaired by Ernest Boyer and the other nine members included several nationally prominent education professors. But the panel was rigged in interesting ways. First, none of the panelists was a teaching field specialist, e.g., a science education professor, so the panel's conception

of the knowledge needed by a beginning teacher was likely to be generic, and this turned out to be the case, which played into the Commissioner's own prejudice that there was very little professional knowledge that was needed at all. Second, the panel was told in its formal charge that it was "not to evaluate the overall system proposed," and that it "must remain aloof from those who support or oppose one or another approach" (Boyer Panel, 1984, Appendix A). The necessity for the restrictions placed on the panel has never been made clear. Even more perplexing was the panel's willingness to accede to the restrictions. The panel was part of a larger context and process, but the panelists were asked to remain ignorant of the events which surrounded their work and which could cause their recommendations to be used in ways that they ordinarily would not countenance. It is as though their silence was being purchased beforehand on the pretext that the less they knew the more dispassionately they could carry out their task. Of course, if they agreed not to look there would be no evil for them to see and to speak about. Since all of the panelists are academics who presumably are committed to academic freedom and the untrammeled pursuit of truth, it is odd that they should have agreed to don the Commissioner's blinders. Even after the recommendations of the Boyer Panel were incorporated into the Commissioner's proposal, no panelist would make public his or her assessment of the overall system, although some were willing to convey their private reservations. Shortly after the panelists had their two-day meeting, one of the panelists, David Berliner, delivered an address at the University of Arizona in which he limned the advancing research on teacher education and the justification this provided for increasing the professional component of teacher education (Berliner, 1984). He has since then published statements

along this same line (Berliner, 1984) but never with specific reference to the state of New Jersey.

Subsequent to its two-day meeting, the Boyer Panel issued a general statement of 14 pages in length. Despite the rambling and internally contradictory nature of the Boyer Panel report, the professional knowledge outlined therein looks very much like the traditional bloc of college education courses.

One of the great ironies in all of this is the contrast between the Commissioner's transparent contempt for the college education program requirements that have evolved through long and painstaking deliberations by national and state standard-setting agencies and his apparent regard for the results of two days of discussion by ten people.

To figure out how the essential knowledge outlined by the Boyer Panel should be incorporated into his proposal, the Commissioner appointed an in-state commission. This commission was clearly loaded in the Commissioner's favor. To begin, the organization whose raison d'etre was teacher education - the New Jersey Association of Colleges for Teacher Education - was not represented. To be sure, one of its members was appointed to the commission, but he was not the president of the NJACTE nor had he been designated by the other members. He had, in fact, campaigned for the Governor under whose auspices the Commissioner's proposal was presented, and he had been a member of the Governor's transition team. Moreover, he was a candidate for the vice presidency of one of the state colleges, a position he obtained soon after the conclusion of the commission's work. Thus, while the Commissioner boasted of his evenhandedness in appointing the commission, he ignored the very organization whose business was teacher education.

It is true that the presidents of the New Jersey Education Association and the New Jersey Federation of Teachers, both of whom were opposed to the Commissioner's proposal, were appointed to the commission, but these were two members out of a total of 21. Among the other 19 were at least 12 people who had publicly endorsed the Commissioner's proposal in hearings before the State Board of Education. This gave the Commissioner a vote of at least 6-1 at the outset.

Among the many things that the Commissioner has never explained is why a special commission was needed. There was already in place the State Board of Examiners whose responsibility it was to consider proposed changes in certification requirements and make recommendations to the Commissioner. This Board has much more than a fleeting acquaintance with teacher education but, perhaps for that very reason, the Commissioner refused to consult with it.

It is not flippant to say that if there is professional knowledge needed by beginning teachers, this knowledge is also needed by those who would presume to design a delivery system. The Boyer Panel had outlined the knowledge in very broad terms. Unless one knew what was subsumed under each term, there could be no basis for gauging the time needed to convey the information or for determining the best instructional setting. To say, for example, that a beginning teacher should know about teaching strategies is to utter only gobbledygook to someone who has never even heard of various teaching models, such as those cited by Kilgore (1984). With but a single exception, the people whom the Commissioner appointed to redesign his delivery system in light of the Boyer Panel recommendations had no expertise in teacher education. They were asked to fill in the gaps in the

Boyer Panel report and they came to the task without any putty.

The final version of the Commissioner's proposal, as adopted by the State Board of Education in September 1984, includes the following "route" to teacher certification:

1. Possess a bachelor's degree with 30 credits in the subject to be taught. However, if someone has been teaching, say, an American history course for five years somewhere, that is considered to be the equivalent of 30 college credits in history.
2. Pass the subject matter portion of the National Teacher Exam, with a passing score yet to be determined. For prospective elementary teachers, the general knowledge portion of the NTE will be used.
3. Get hired by a school district.
4. Complete a 20-30 day orientation period, including observation of a classroom and 80 hours of instruction in the Boyer Panel topics.
5. Take over a classroom at full pay, with occasional supervision by the school staff. Take another 120 hours of instruction in the Boyer Panel topics.

After the Board adoption, the Commissioner decided that the instruction in the Boyer Panel topics would be offered by the State Education Department, obviating the need for cooperation with college education programs.

CONTRAST AND CONCLUSION

The college programs in New Jersey that exist for the training of teach-

ers have been under attack for more than a year. The attack was initiated by the State Education Commissioner, who has jurisdiction over these teacher training programs. Rather than simply use his authority to correct the weaknesses he alleged, the Commissioner chose to create an alternative training system which would compete with the college programs. Now that the Commissioner's system has been approved by the State Board of Education, it is time to compare it with the New Jersey college programs over which it is supposed to be an improvement.

Students in the college programs are required to maintain a grade point average of 2.5 or better (A=4). There is no minimum grade point average in the Commissioner's program. Students in the college programs must acquire a broad liberal arts background by taking courses in all of the following areas: arts, humanities, mathematics, science, social science, and technology. No such expectation exists for students in the Commissioner's program. The students in the college programs must demonstrate proficiency in English and mathematics, as tested by the New Jersey Department of Higher Education. This proficiency requirement is absent from the Commissioner's program. Students in the college programs must complete a sequentially developed major of at least 30 credits in the subject to be taught. Students in the Commissioner's program must have 30 credits but these credits need not constitute a coherent major, and all 30 credits can be taken at the freshman and sophomore level. Moreover, if a student in the Commissioner's program has already taught the subject somewhere for five years, that is considered to be as good as having taken 30 college credits in the subject. If a student in one of the college programs is preparing to teach a comprehensive subject like social studies or science, courses have to be taken among the several

disciplines which make up this subject. For example, the prospective social studies teacher in a college program has to take courses in world history, American history, political science, economics, geography, and sociology or cultural anthropology. Prospective teachers of comprehensive subjects in the Commissioner's program have no distribution requirement at all and need not have any coursework in the subjects they actually end up teaching. Students in the college programs must take coursework in methods of teaching the particular subject; for example, someone who is preparing to be a science teacher must learn techniques that are unique to the teaching of science. The Commissioner's program covers only general teaching approaches. Students in the college programs acquire extensive and progressively developed experience working in schools, with this experience being accumulated from the sophomore through the senior year of the college program, and culminating in a full semester of student teaching without pay and under the supervision of a regular classroom teacher. Students in the Commissioner's program take a 20-30 day practicum, during which time they are paid as fully salaried teachers, and after which brief time they are given complete responsibility for a classroom.

The Commissioner's program is certainly an easier and cheaper way to train teachers, both for the state and for the teachers who are being trained. His program also holds promise for eliminating the need for college education faculty. However, the Commissioner may have won a victory he will come to regret. By his disparagement of the college education programs, he held himself up as someone who could do a better job of attacting and preparing teachers. By his creation of an alternative to the college

programs, he imposed upon himself the burden of proving that he can do the better job. Even though he has the legal authority for judging what he created against what he disparaged, he must know that his judgment will be scrutinized by others for its fairness. If it is found wanting, the evidence to that effect will be broadcast vigorously. The Commissioner will learn that competition - even rigged competition - cuts two ways. Unfortunately, the better product is not always the better marketed product, and the Commissioner has proven himself adept at marketing.

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